

"To Reveal the Eternal':

The Spiritual Friendship of Margaret Cropper and Evelyn Underhill"

By Sabine Hyland

Professor of World Christianity, University of St Andrews

Introduction:

In her Introduction to Margaret Cropper's *Christ Crucified: A Passion Play*", Evelyn Underhill heaped praise on the playwright's ability to express spiritual truths:

"Here, it seems to me, CHRIST CRUCIFIED is true to the noblest tradition of religious drama; which is required -- as indeed all great art is required -- to reveal the Eternal, and evoke our love and wonder... The narrative scenes of CHRIST CRUCIFIED have a touching beauty which no one can miss. But that which lifts them to the level of greatness, and endows them with purifying power, is the overwhelming sense of their eternal and universal significance as vehicles of Divine action".<sup>1</sup>

Underhill's words focus on what she believed to be the essence of Christian art -- the representation of "the awful realities and mysterious movements of the spiritual world", far from the dross of "our hurried and self-centred modern" lives.<sup>2</sup> Yet who was the dramatist to whom she addressed such lavish and heart-felt appreciation for her capacity to "reveal the Eternal"?

---

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Underhill. "Introductory Note", In: *Christ Crucified: A Passion Play in Six Scenes* by Margaret Cropper (London: The Sheldon Press, 1932).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Margaret Cropper is best known in Anglican circles for completing Lucy Menzies' biography of Underhill. Cropper's own writings, however, have been almost entirely forgotten, although she was considered one of the pre-eminent Lake district poets of her day, renowned for "her supreme skill... clear, individual voice ... and deep understanding of the [Lake] folk and their dialect".<sup>3</sup> Cropper's influential friendship with Underhill has likewise been largely overlooked. The two writers corresponded frequently, sending rough drafts of their manuscripts to the other for comment and correction. Underhill stayed with Cropper at the latter's home in the Lake District on numerous occasions, and it was Cropper who recommended Reginald Somerset Ward to Underhill as her next spiritual director after Baron Friedrich von Hügel. This essay will present a brief survey of Cropper's life and career before examining Underhill and Cropper's friendship.

Margaret Cropper (1886-1980):

Cropper's published works include plays, hymns, histories, biographies, prayer books, and ten volumes of poetry. The renowned English poet and critic, Norman Nicholson OBE, described her as "one of the most accomplished poets [from the Lake District] ... since the time of Wordsworth". He particularly admired how she depicted the speech of the "farmers and dalesmen and cottagers" of rural Cumbria. As he wrote, "Margaret Cropper seems to me to belong to the same tradition as such poets as Hardy, Edward

---

<sup>3</sup> Michael Ffinch. "Foreword", In: *Poems: Margaret Cropper*, edited by Anne Hopkinson (Kendal: WG Print, 1983).

Thomas, and Wilfred Owen, who, in their quiet unspectacular way, helped to bring about a revolution in the language of poetry".<sup>4</sup>

She was born in 1886 in Burneside, near Kendal in the Lake District, where she would live for most of her life. Her father, Charles James Cropper, was a wealthy business man from a Quaker family, while her mother, the Honorable Edith Holland, was raised as an Anglican in Hertfordshire where the family seat, Munden House, was located. Margaret's maternal grandfather, Henry Holland, 1st Viscount Knutsford, served as Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1887 to 1892, during which period he was primarily concerned with South African affairs. Margaret inherited her grandfather's interest in South African missions, and she visited South Africa twice, "helping friends there who were working for the Church".<sup>5</sup> Her grandfather also nurtured her love of poetry, frequently reading poems aloud during their family visits.<sup>6</sup>

One of five siblings, she remained especially close to her sister Mary, who would author several books of religious instruction for children.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Norman Nicholson. "Forward", In: *Something and Everything* by Margaret Cropper. (Kendal: Titus, Wilson & Son, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Anne Hopkinson. "Acknowledgements", In: *Poems: Margaret Cropper*, edited by Anne Hopkinson (Kendal: WG Print, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Ffinch, *Portrait of Kendal and the Kent Valley*, (London: Robert Hale, 1983), pp. 29-32.

<sup>7</sup> Her works include: Mary Fletcher, *Under Christ's Banner: A Year's Course in Religious Teaching for Little Children* (London: National Society, nd); Mary Fletcher, *A Time for Decision* (London: Blandford Press, 1959), and Mary Fletcher, *My Very First Prayerbook* (London: Blandford Press, nd).

Although Margaret felt a deep connection to Quakerism, she remained a practicing Anglican throughout her life. In 1909, when she was twenty-three, she became active in the newly formed Girls Diocesan Association (GDA), which sponsored talks, study groups, plays, and other activities to deepen young women's experience of Christianity.<sup>8</sup> It was during this period that she came under the guidance of Reginald Somerset Ward, who worked closely with the GDA from 1909 to 1914 training Sunday School teachers.<sup>9</sup>

Elkin Matthews, the London bookseller who published W B Yeats, John Masefield, James Joyce, and other leading poets, produced Cropper's first book of poetry in 1914 when she was twenty-eight years old. Simply titled *Poems*, its verses expressed the varied moods of the Lake District, from delicate rhymes about thistledowns and sparrow hawks to the grittier "Ballad of Two Tramping Men".<sup>10</sup> She then turned her attention to writing a series of plays, including the exquisite *The Water Woman* (1926), before coming out with her next book of poetry, *The Broken Hearthstone*, in 1927, followed by *The Springing Well* in 1929.<sup>11</sup> These two volumes include more meditations on the Cumbrian wilderness, while touching upon the sacrifice of Christ, pacifism,

---

<sup>8</sup> "Girls" referred to unmarried women between the ages of 18 and 35.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Cropper, *The Girls Diocesan Association, 1901-1961 and 1961-1964*. (London: The Girls Diocesan Association Trustees, 1976). pp. 1-6.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Cropper, *Poems*. (London: Elkin Matthews, 1914).

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Cropper, *The Water Woman, A Play*. (London: Gowans and Grey, 1926); Margaret Cropper, *The Broken Hearthstone*. (London: Philip Allan and Co., 1927); Margaret Cropper, *The Springing Well*. (London: Philip Allan and Co., 1929).

and other topics. She also composed Christian prayers and hymns that appeared in multiple editions.

Cropper alternated between poetry and drama for the next fifteen years. During this period she published three book-length narrative poems set in rural Cumbria: *Little Mary Crosbie* (1932); *The End of the Road* (1935); and *Anthony Broom* (1937).<sup>12</sup> These works display an ethnographic sensitivity to the region's cultural traditions, while emphasising how the local communities were connected to an animate landscape of mountains, forests, and streams. In *The Literary Guide to the Lake District*, Grevel Lindop expressed his admiration for how these first two poems captured the living voice of the rural Cumbrians:

"two magnificent longer works, *Little Mary Crosbie* and *The End of the Road*, published in the 1930s, give a vivid picture of the life of the Westmorland poor in that period and, though written in standard English, make entirely natural use of local dialect forms and rhythms, something no other poet has achieved."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Cropper, *Little Mary Crosbie*. (London: Constable & Co, 1932); Margaret Cropper, *The End of the Road*. (London: Thomas, Nelson & Sons, 1935); Margaret Cropper, *Anthony Broom*. (Kendal: Titus, Wilson, & Son, 1937).

<sup>13</sup> Grevel Lindop, *Literary Guide to the Lake District*. (Sigma Press, 2005) pp. 19-20.

Her one act comedies *A Dose of Physic* (1931),<sup>14</sup> and *Country Cottage* (1939), which likewise took place in Cumbria, were published by the Village Drama Society. The latter work "was awarded a Prize in the Playwriting Competition organised by the Village Drama section of the British Drama League in 1938".<sup>15</sup> Most of Cropper's theatrical works from this time, however, dealt with religious themes, and were intended to be performed by church youth groups. For example, the dedication of *A Great and Mighty Wonder: A Nativity Play*, states: "This play is written for the students at Bishop's Hostel, London. It is dedicated to all who played in it there, in happy remembrance ... of the beauty of the production".<sup>16</sup> Cropper apparently had drafts of her plays performed by Anglican youth groups, allowing her to work out any difficulties with the script or production, before publication in their final form. Her last play, a missionary drama called *I Send You Forth*, was published in 1945.<sup>17</sup>

At this point she decided to devote her energy to history, publishing *Flame Touches Flame*, a book about the spirituality of six Anglican saints from

---

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Cropper. *A Dose of Physic: A Comedy in One Act*. (London: Village Drama Society, 1931).

<sup>15</sup> "Introductory Note" In: *Country Cottage: A Comedy in One Act* by Margaret Cropper (London: Village Drama Society, 1939).

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Cropper, *A Great and Mighty Wonder: A Nativity Play*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1938).

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Cropper, *I Send You Forth*. (London: Anglican Young People's Association, 1945).

the 17th century, in 1949.<sup>18</sup> She had almost finished *Sparks Among the Stubble*,<sup>19</sup> a study of seven 18th century Anglican saints, when her friend Lucy Menzies died in 1954 and she found herself taking on the sad task of completing Evelyn Underhill's biography. Cropper was seventy-two years old by the time her classic work on Underhill was published in 1958. Two more prose books followed -- *Shining Lights: Six Anglican Saints of the 19th Century*<sup>20</sup> and a history of The Girls Diocesan Association, the latter published in 1976 when Cropper was ninety. Although her regionalist style of poetry had fallen out of fashion in her later years, she carried on writing verse until her death in 1980.

Margaret never married and so her niece, Anne Hopkinson, served as her literary executor. In 1983 Anne posthumously published a selection of her aunt's poems with the intention that, as Sir John Betjeman wrote, "The more people read [Margaret Cropper], the more people will enjoy her".<sup>21</sup>

While the bulk of Cropper's prose works chronicled Anglican history, references to Quakerism can be found throughout her poetry. "Verses at Sunbreak", which Margaret read aloud during the celebration of George Fox's Tercentenary in 1924, commemorated the seaside graves of Fox and other early Quakers. The main address of the tercentenary event, *Memories of Swarthmore*, was given by one of Margaret's neighbours, Lucy Holdworth, the

---

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Cropper, *Flame Touches Flame*. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949).

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Cropper, *Sparks Among the Stubble: Seven Anglican Saints*. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1955).

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Cropper, *Shining Lights: Six Anglican Saints of the 19th Century*. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963).

<sup>21</sup> Ffinch, "Forward", 1983.

author of numerous books on Quaker spirituality and a friend and correspondent of the eminent Quaker scholar Rufus Jones. Cropper's poem mourned George Fox in the burial grounds with other Quaker heroes:

"Windswept -- there is scant shelter from the sea/ But here will be God's spacious silences,/ His Liberty".<sup>22</sup>

A somewhat more critical view of the Quakers appears in *Little Mary Crosbie* (1932). In this poem, about a girl from a Quaker orphanage who is adopted by a childless country widow, the Quaker establishment is shown to be so constrained by the institutionalisation of good works that the members have lost their sense of the "inward light". The committee to decide whether the widow would get an orphan was described as, "So dull they seemed, the drab hued Committee women,/ Earnest and tired, the serious dutiful men".<sup>23</sup> The Committee finally agreed to send "Little Mary Crosbie, whom nobody could tame" to the widow, Susannah Winter, for "a month on trial".<sup>24</sup> During this month, Mary blossomed as she discovered the wonders of the countryside, gathering wildflowers and playing imaginary games in an abandoned cottage in the woods. Despite the healthfulness of her new life under Susannah's care, the Quaker inspector found that "it looked as if [Mary] were running wild", and determined that the girl should return to the

---

<sup>22</sup> Cropper, Margaret, "Verses at Sunbreak", In: *Memories of Swarthmore*, by L V Holdsworth (London: Leominster, 1924), p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Cropper, *Little Mary Crosbie*, 1932. p. 10. A revised version of the poem was published in Cropper, *The End of the Road*, 1935. In our personal collection of Cropper's works, my husband and I own the original manuscript of the poem in Margaret's hand, marked with the revisions.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.



orphanage. Fortunately, the Secretary, an elderly man who often disrupted the committee with his unorthodox opinions, had visited Mary himself, and had seen how she was flourishing. He persuaded the committee that the child should stay with the widow, explaining to them that Mary was "not naughty, but a good girl now"; as he spoke, the committee's "painstaking and apathetic faces" were transformed by the Spirit, and a "laugh spread wide/ over the members, like a rippling tide/ of geniality". Because of the Secretary's insight and words, "Love's wisdom had discerned the Spirit's Laws", and the Divine will flowed through the assembly.<sup>25</sup>

Cropper's view of the contemporary Quakers as being almost afraid of their earlier, powerful mysticism was expressed in "Quaker Wedding Gown". This poem describes a grey, "glimmering silken cover" that had once served as a wedding gown. With Quaker thrift, it had been converted into a quilted bed cover for honoured guests. Quilts are a quintessential expression of Quaker spirituality and Cropper used them repeatedly as an important symbol.<sup>26</sup> In *Quaker Wedding Gown*, she wrote,

"...Rich, heavy silk it was; and oh, the easing  
To tear-worn eyes of its stiff graciousness,  
And spiritual colours! All the story

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37-39.

<sup>26</sup> For example, in *The Water-woman* (1926), the elderly mother says, "And see the quilt I've laid upon the bed. It was my mother's and her mother's too... I reckon out/ It's lain on bridal beds, that very quilt/ Five times and then at funeral times... We've lost the craft and cunning we used to have in fashioning those things".

Of generations back of Friends might take  
That silk for symbol -- hint of the Dove's Wings,  
Of the spare ways of the spirit, the worth of truth,  
Of hearts a little afraid of their own rapture,  
Dawn on the narrow way..."<sup>27</sup>

Eventually the quilt was repurposed as a cover for a Quaker who was dying, and then as their burial shroud.

"...It seemed of all things gentle and rare enough  
For the silence of those days, seemed spirit enough  
To cover the body turned so frail and fading.  
Though lacking its spirit yet most possessed by it;  
Seemed peaceful enough to still fear's questionings.  
It had experience of venturing Love,  
And beauty enough to clasp the hands of Death..."

Although Cropper believed that the contemporary Quakers possessed "hearts a little afraid of their own rapture", she clearly felt deep ties to manifold aspects of the Quaker charism-- to their simplicity, their economy, and to the joyous mysticism that lay at the heart of George Fox's vision.

Underhill and Cropper's friendship (1931-1941):

---

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Cropper, "Quaker Wedding Gown" In: *Poems: Margaret Cropper*, edited by Anne Hopkinson, pp 51-52.

The friendship between the two writers began in the spring of 1931 when Evelyn came to dine at the London home of Margaret's sister, Mary. Mary, known as Maisie, had married Sir Walter Morley Fletcher, a leading biomedical researcher and a relative of former Prime Minister H. H. Asquith. She was also the Secretary of the Wives' Fellowship, "a company of educated young married women".<sup>28</sup> The Fellowship wished for Underhill to give a retreat for them, and so Maisie arranged a dinner party in Evelyn's honour to which Margaret was invited. Cropper recalled:

"I first met Evelyn and Hubert at my sister Maisie Fletcher's house in the spring of 1931. They came to dine there, and we had a very friendly little evening, and a few days after Evelyn came to see a little play of mine which Martin Browne was playing in at a School of Religious Drama somewhere in Kensington. I suppose it was a few weeks later that I had my first letter from her."<sup>29</sup>

A lively correspondence ensued, and by November, Evelyn paid a visit to Margaret in the latter's new home, called Far Park, in Westmoreland:

"...which Evelyn loved and where she paid me four most heart-warming visits, twice with Hubert, once with Lucy [Menzies], and once alone. We began very early to exchange works, I sending her religious plays, poems and sometimes prayers and she repaying me with much more important volumes, and pamphlets and bits of MSS to read.... Evelyn came to stay at Far

---

<sup>28</sup> Margaret Cropper, *Evelyn Underhill* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1958), p. 160.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 165.

Park for two days in the middle of April just before her retreat at Water Millock, which we went on to together.

It was my first spring at Far Park and great fun to share with her the quantities of white violets on the little terrace, and the daffodils in the steep orchard. Up behind was the fell, and going slowly she would walk up and see the lovely Kentmere Hills to which we paid a nearer visit one day.

One evening I read to her what I had done of the Passion play, and found what depth of sympathy and understanding she had for anyone who was trying to write. She was quite critical and I altered a good many things because they grated on her. I think it was her first acquaintance with religious drama.

We exchanged a good many lovely things that we had collected, including prayers that she had thought worthy of a place in her copy of Bishop Andrewes, which was interlarded with things she loved."<sup>30</sup>

Cropper would attend many of Underhill's subsequent retreats. Spurred, no doubt, by Evelyn's influence, Margaret wrote a five act play about a Catholic saint, *The Legend of St Christopher* (1932).<sup>31</sup> As explained above, Evelyn heavily revised the Passion Play, *Christ Crucified*, that she would later praise so highly. Cropper dedicated *The Nativity with Angels* (1934) published on Oxford University Press, to Evelyn "who has given so much to me, with my love". Both plays feature many set speeches by angels, a new feature in her work. In *The Nativity with Angels*, for example, Gabriel speaks to Mary as she cradles the infant Christ:

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 170-171.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Cropper, *The Legend of St Christopher. A Play in Five Scenes.* (1932).

"Mary, this is the ending, and beginning  
Of your obedience. This that you have done,  
This deep abandonment to God in you,  
Hath given Jesus to the expectant earth;  
Such wonder dwells in your astonishment.  
Let other souls marvel, and make surrender,  
And, following in your way, bear Christ for men".<sup>32</sup>

It is likely that Margaret's turn to composing biographies of Anglican saints was inspired in part by how Evelyn and Lucy Menzies wrote so eloquently about medieval and Catholic mystics. Margaret wished to demonstrate how the Anglican tradition could give rise to spiritual men and women as well, from Nicholas Ferrar and Henry Vaughan in the 17th century, to William Law and Robert Nelson in the 18th century, and to Edward King and Christina Rossetti in the 19th century, and to many others.

After Evelyn sent to Margaret a draft of the chapter on Sacrifice for the book *Worship*, the two women corresponded about the meaning of sacrifice. "Why", Evelyn wrote, "does man think that God requires the death of the victim?"<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately we do not possess Margaret's letters to Evelyn; however, considering the degree to which Divine sacrifice formed a theme in

---

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Cropper, *The Nativity with Angels* (London: Oxford University Press 1934) p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Underhill to Cropper, October 3, 1934. Evelyn Underhill, *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, Edited by Charles Williams. (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1944). p. 236.

her poetry, one expects that she would have provided an interesting response to Evelyn's query. In another letter Evelyn seems to allude to Margaret's Quaker background. Underhill mentioned that she "got a new edition of the Sayings of St John of the Cross ... how terse and deep and splendidly unpius his real voice was and how amazingly daring his spiritual declarations -- a wonderful example of how to be a Quaker without being a Quaker, if you know what I mean".<sup>34</sup>

One of the most significant ways in which Cropper's friendship impacted Underhill was by the introduction of Reginald Somerset Ward, who would become Evelyn's spiritual director for the last nine years of her life. Late in 1932, Margaret urged Evelyn to see Ward and helped to arrange the meeting. Ward and Underhill got along immediately, as Evelyn wrote to Margaret:

"I have had the most wonderful day with Mr Somerset Ward. I think he is the most remarkable soul specialist I've met since the Baron, and the thrilling thing is that though apparently so utterly unlike, their method of direction and point of view is very close.

He certainly cleared my mind a lot, and concluded by delivering a rousing and fatherly lecture on the well known subject of over-strain. I felt it to have been a most profitable day, and am very grateful to him and to you."<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Underhill to Cropper, dated 16 October, 1933. *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill*. p. 218.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 174.

A full analysis of Ward's influence on Underhill's thought remains to be written, but there is no doubt that he gave steady guidance during very trying periods in her life. Robyn Wrigley-Carr's study of Underhill's 'Flowered Notebook' provides invaluable insights into the importance of Ward's spiritual direction to Evelyn.<sup>36</sup> Evelyn recounted the details of Ward's assistance in these notebooks, and the advice that he gave to her on a variety of concerns. His suggestions for her were tempered by the gentleness toward ill health and excessive busyness that were hallmarks of his spiritual teachings. He emphasised that she needed to be wary of the "sin of overwork", and had to indulge in enjoyable hobbies and fun on a regular basis.<sup>37</sup> Ward convinced Evelyn to take an entire year off of giving retreats in 1935, which allowed her to finish her book, *Worship*, and kept her from a physical breakdown.<sup>38</sup>

Ward had been educated at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and served for a year at a Mission in the slum district of Walworth before he was ordained a deacon in 1904.<sup>39</sup> After discovering the works of St Teresa of Avila and Mother Julian of Norwich, he decided to dedicate himself to spiritual pursuits, and in 1909 he left the curacy of Barnsbury to take up the position of Secretary of the Sunday School Institute. It was at this time that he and

---

<sup>36</sup> Robyn Wrigley-Carr, *The Spiritual Formation of Evelyn Underhill* (London, SPCK, 2020), pp. 38-41.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Cropper, *Evelyn Underhill*, pp. 184-186.

<sup>39</sup> Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson and Rowan Williams, *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 585.

Margaret first met, beginning a friendship that would last until his death in 1962. In 1915 he felt the call to devote himself completely to serving as a spiritual director and thus, with the support of Bishop Edward Talbot, moved to a house in Farncombe that he named 'Ravenscroft', after the ravens who fed Elijah. From there he "exercised an itinerant and largely hidden ministry of spiritual guidance which had a deep significance for many Anglicans".<sup>40</sup> Three times a year he travelled throughout the country, speaking in person with his directees, dispensing spiritual advice, and hearing confessions. The rest of his time was spent in Ravenscroft, where he carried on the work of spiritual direction through correspondence, and wrote two books on "mystical religion", all the while adhering to a regular schedule of prayer, and fulfilling his duties as a husband and father. His chapel in Ravenscroft was panelled with relief carvings of his favourite authors -- Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, St Teresa of Avila, and St John of the Cross.<sup>41</sup> One imagines that Evelyn would have felt very much at home there during her visits.

\*\*\*\*\*

For many years after her death, Cropper's biography of Evelyn was one of the few books available about this remarkable woman. In many ways, Underhill's full length biography is similar to the shorter biographies that Cropper composed in her three books about Anglican saints. Writing with an ethnographic spirit, Margaret prioritised placing each saintly figure within the context of their particular culture and historical period. With the success of *Flame Touches Flame* and *Sparks Among the Stubble*, both of which were

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Reginald Somerset Ward, *His Life and Letters*, edited by Bishop E R Morgan. (Oxford, A R Mowbray and Co, 1963), p. 27.



popular among the reading public and went through many re-printings, their London publisher, Longman, Green, and Co., was eager to publish *Evelyn Underhill*. The biography was well received; Gerard Meath, for example, praised it for having been "written with great affection and frankness by one who knew her personally... [it helps] to solve the puzzle that [Underhill] will always be".<sup>42</sup>

The significance of Cropper's biography of Underhill was re-affirmed when it was republished as *The Life of Evelyn Underhill: An Intimate Portrait of the Groundbreaking Author of Mysticism* in 2003 with a new Forward by Dana Greene. Susie Sheldrake wrote that it "offers a vital introduction to Underhill's writing and is a 'must-read'". This, despite the fact that Sheldrake castigated Cropper's analysis of Underhill as "largely uncritical, hagiographical, and ignor[ing of] her personal struggles with scrupulosity, doubt, and with what today we would call depression". Nonetheless, she continued, "for the reader interested in the social and religious background to Underhill in the first part of the twentieth century, Cropper is a treasure trove... the book... provides a highly detailed and personal account of this remarkable woman and her idiosyncratic circle of friends and brings her world alive".<sup>43</sup>

Underhill possessed a great gift for friendships, and it is fortunate for us, her readers, that her fellowship with Cropper resulted in this invaluable biography. Gossipy at times, and replete with colourful details about

---

<sup>42</sup> Gerard Meath, "Review of Evelyn Underhill", *Life of the Spirit*, vol 13, no. 154, April 1959. pp. 476-478.

<sup>43</sup> Susie Sheldrake, "Review of *The Life of Evelyn Underhill*", *Anglican Theological Review*, vol. 86, no. 2 (2004), pp. 360-361

Evelyn's friends, vacations, and cats, it nonetheless provides a balanced and full account of one of the most extraordinary spiritual writers of the 20th century. Margaret's epithet for Christina Rossetti can be applied equally well to Evelyn: "[t]he lives of the saints are so various. There are some flung overseas... there are some whose lives are lived out in quite constricted circumstances. But we never get from them constricted powers or vision. The door at the end of the narrow passage opens on to Eternity".<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Cropper, *Shining Lights*. (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1963), p. 69.